DEATH AND DISHONOR

FIVE SOLDIERS FOUGHT SHOULDER TO SHOULDER IN THE MOST BRUTAL BATTLE OF THE IRAQ WAR. HOME AGAIN AS HEROES, ONE OF THEM VANISHED, AND THE REST KEPT THEIR SILENCE. AS A FATHER SEARCHES FOR HIS SON, THE CLUES LEAD BACK TO THE BLOODSTAINED STREETS OF BAGHDAD

BY MARK BOAL

PROLOGUE: WELCOME HOME

The red-and-yellow sign outside the Platinum Club advertises HOT WOMEN, COLD BEER. Inside are wall-to-wall mirrors, $3 drafts and two dancing poles, around which young women, some still in orthodontic braces, dance naked except for G-strings. This is the classiest strip club in Columbus, Georgia, home of the U.S. Army's Fort Benning, and it was here on the evening of July 14, 2003 that Richard Davis, Jacob Burgoyne and three fellow veterans of the Iraq war—Mario Navarrete, Douglas Woodcoff and Alberto Martinez—decided to celebrate. It was their second stop that evening, after burgers and many, many beers at a Hooters over on Adams Farm Road, on the day they were all together again after returning from Iraq.

Two months earlier these men of the third platoon of B Company had fought side by side in some of the bloodiest battles of Baghdad. Now they sat together, close to the center stage, talking to the strippers. Around midnight, after several more rounds of drinks, they became so rowdy and loud that the bouncer told them to leave. Typical soldier stuff, a waitress who was working that night recalled, just guys "shouting and being disruptive." They swigged the last of their beers and stumbled outside into a small parking lot behind a gas station and a Waffle House restaurant, and then, flush with alcohol in the warm Georgia evening, they began to argue.

Tempers flared over who was at fault for getting them kicked out of the club,

PHOTOGRAPH OF LANNY DAVIS BY DAN WINTERS, ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI, FEBRUARY 11, 2004

according to two of the men. But the argument could have been about anything. These soldiers had fought among themselves with fists and knives in Kuwait, where they were stranded for two weeks in sweltering tents after two months of intense urban combat. That night Burgoyne, who was known to possess a vicious streak, went after Davis. Navarrete says he joined the fight.

What happened in the next hour may never be fully known, but this much is certain: All five soldiers piled into Martinez's car; the doors slammed, and they sped off into the summer night.

And then Richard Davis disappeared.

PART 1: LOST

Staff Sergeant Lanny Davis, retired, a United States Army veteran, husband, father and proud owner of a tidy ranch home in serene St. Charles, Missouri, lives a life you could call squared away. The lawn is mowed, the white Chevy pickup in the driveway is spotless. In his speech Lanny is courteous in the slightly formal manner of a career military man. His hair is close-cropped, his loafers polished and his slacks pressed. At the age of 55 he keeps himself lean enough to get back into uniform if he's needed.

Up and down the block in this suburb of St. Louis, American flags fly outside the well-kept houses, and the sense of community is so strong that front doors are rarely locked. Behind such a door on the morning of July 16, 2003 Lanny spoke into the telephone and patiently corrected the caller: "Look, you're not—you're not talking about my son."

"Yes, sir, Richard is AWOL," said the caller, an officer from Fort Benning.

"If anybody went AWOL, it wouldn't be my son," Lanny repeated. "My boy is pro-military."

Many of them still uniforms. The smell lingered in their was disturbed by

Having served 20 years in uniform, 16 of them as a military policeman investigating all manner of crimes and misdemeanors, Lanny has sharp instincts about the truth, and this story rang false. He had raised his boy on war stories and patriotism and found it impossible to believe that Richard would run from his duty. Why would he go absent without leave? Why didn't he call home? When the caller added that Richard's clothes and toothbrush remained undisturbed in his room, Lanny felt sure that something was wrong. His son, he thought, must be in some sense lost.

Earlier that day, 700 miles southeast of St. Charles, on the expansive grass parade grounds of Fort Benning, there assembled the 150-odd men of Davis's unit: B Company, First Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, Third Brigade, Third Infantry Division (Mechanized). They stood in professionally precise rows, highly experienced soldiers, veterans ages 23 to 29. They had led the U.S. assault on Baghdad, having formed the "tip of the spear" that raced up the western bank of the Euphrates, and they had killed in greater numbers than perhaps any other unit in the theater.

Home for less than a week, many of them still wore their tattered uniforms. The smell of burning flesh lingered in their nostrils. Their sleep was disturbed by nightmares. They had been given a two-day pass and ordered to relax and recreate—an order their sergeant was now saying one man had followed to excess.

"From third platoon we have a man out of range—Davis. He is probably fucked-up drunk," said First Sergeant Jon Sabala, standing at the head of the formation. "If any of you assholes see him, you better drag his ass back to work." No one spoke. These men had spent six months in Iraq and Kuwait, living in close quarters with Davis. They knew what he was like in the crucible of combat and the tedium of occupation, knew him in a way that most people never would. And four of them—Burgoyne, Martinez, Navarrete and Woodcoff—knew Davis's precise whereabouts that day. But not a single man spoke. When the truth came out four months later about what had happened to Richard Davis, the witnesses described a crime of such savagery that it left the survivors of B Company wondering what the war had done to their humanity.

WAR STORIES

Four months earlier, somewhere north of the Iraq-Kuwait border, an Army Humvee raced across the bright, endless desert, leaving dust clouds in its wake. At the wheel was Specialist Robert Sapitan of Jacksonville, Florida, and bounc-

Like father, like son (from top): Staff Sergeant Lanny Davis celebrates his 29th birthday in Germany with three-month-old Richard, in June 1978. Richard's mother, Remy, a U.S. Army medic and behavioral science specialist, in 1973. Richard the road warrior, photographed by a platoon mate in the Iraqi desert in early March 2003. Richard (kneeling), training in Kuwait in 2002. Richard (left) and a fellow soldier in Kuwait in February 2003, waiting to move out to Iraq.

ing in the passenger seat was a scowling young soldier, Specialist Richard Davis. The men traveled in silence. They were strangers, thrown together at the last moment when Sapitan's usual passenger, his commanding officer, decided to ride in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle. Neither Sapitan nor Davis was happy with the assignment, which put them just behind the leading edge of the convoy. "We wanted to do our part in the war," Sapitan recalls. "We wanted to feel that we earned the recognition."

As they plunged deeper into Iraq, the landscape changed from bleak to macabre, the horizon now littered with the first casualties of the American invasion. They drove past smoldering heaps of twisted metal, inside of which sat blackened immolated torsos with elbow joints protruding straight out, missing forearms or hands. In sandbag bunkers they saw what might have been the charred remains of a conversation circle, a chat that had been interrupted by a fireball. Nicknamed "crispy critters," the dead became objects of wonder and amusement for the troops, many of whom took photographs with digital or disposable cameras. (Davis carried a couple of the disposable kind.) In one particularly sharp close-up that made it back to America, a pulped head with blood-matted hair wears the sticker of an American skateboard manufacturer.

Taking what they called "crazy photos," though, hardly compensated for the grim march, and the men felt, perhaps for the first time in their young lives, how sudden and instantaneous death can be in battle. "Those Bradleys and Abramses, they can kill from very far away," says one soldier, "and I always wondered what it would be like to be sitting there smoking a cigarette and talking to your buddy, and then he just turns to toast, and you didn't even hear the round coming." He pauses for a moment and then explains, "Because you only hear the misses."

wore their tattered of burning flesh nostrils. Their sleep nightmares.

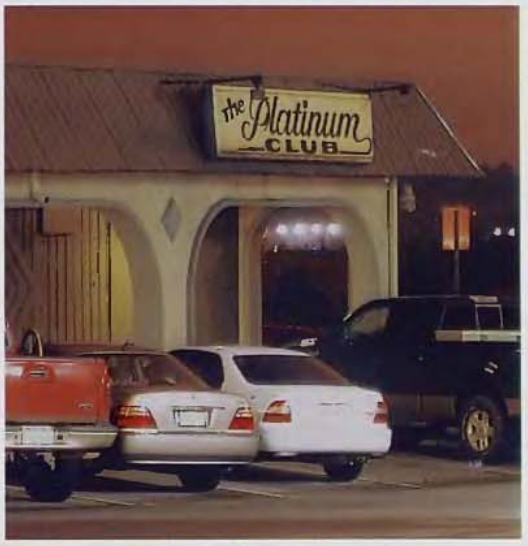
The monotony was broken only by such tasks as rescuing the occasional fuel truck that had sunk into the sand. Davis was especially eager to see combat. He wanted to collect his own war stories. An enthusiastic fighter, he subscribed to *Soldier of Fortune* magazine and bought all the high-speed gear that commandos carry: flight jackets, pistol grips, extra ammo pouches, grenade clips, knives. He'd already been in the Army for five years—five years spent learning to kill. He'd toiled in the gym until his body was brick-hard, and he could crush a man with his bare hands, elbows or feet. He was a weapons expert, having spent thousands of hours firing howitzers and rifles, machine guns and pistols, detonating grenades and plastic explosives, mutilating mock targets. But never once had he trained his sights on a live enemy.

He had enlisted at 19, in 1998. A year later, while peacekeeping in freezing-cold Bosnia, he'd manned a .50-caliber machine gun, but his closest contact with a foreign power had been when he loaned a pair of winter gloves to a Russian grunt. In 2002, stationed on the Iraq-Kuwait border, he spent five months trudging around the Kuwaiti desert. Now he was back in the dunes, pissed off. "All I'm doing is training. That is all we do," he complained in a letter to his father before the invasion began. "We sleep in a 60-man tent with no water—the last shower I had was two weeks ago. The only thing that keeps me going is hearing the REMFs [Vietnam-era slang for "rear-echelon motherfuckers"] complain about the conditions."

And now he was riding with a stranger in a glorified jeep behind the front. "Not out of harm's way by any means," Sapitan recalls, "but we weren't getting shot at every day like our buddies were."

It was a terrible disappointment to Davis, who grew up on his father's stories of Vietnam, an entirely different kind of war, one in which American soldiers found their self-assurance gradually worn away. Lanny Davis had volunteered at 20 and turned 21 in the jungle, with a bottle of Johnnie Walker in one hand and 33 men under his command. A buck sergeant, the highest-ranking man out where it mattered—"where the road hit the river," he'd say—he had "the power of God." Patrolling at night, taking whole villages, he saw enough enemy fire to come home believing that "the most beautiful sight in the world is a fleet of B-52s flying overhead."

Richard inherited his looks from his mother, Remy, a Filipino American medic, but he took into his soul his father's love of the military, a Davis trait for two centuries, he was told, ever since Jefferson Davis had battled the Union. The military,



One night, many questions still unanswered (from top): The classiest strip club in Columbus, Georgia, where Richard Davis was last seen. The defendants (from left): Jacob Burgoyne, Alberto Martinez, Mario Navarrete and Douglas Woodcoff. The isolated area of Milgen Road where Richard Davis's body was left from July to November 2003. The funeral of Specialist Davis, December 13, 2003, in Apple Valley, California. "How could they do this to a fellow soldier?" the coroner asked.

SHELL SHOCK AND AWE

Forget calling in an air strike. Even the personal weapons wielded in Iraq have amazingly lethal capabilities

M4 CARBINE

JOB: The rifle is issued to squad leaders, sergeants and other field personnel.
HISTORY: Colt's M4 is basically a shortened M16, which has been the standard-issue infantry rifle since 1964. The M4 weighs 1.3 pounds less than the 8.8-pound original, with which it shares about 85 percent of its parts.
FIREPOWER: It uses the same 5.56-millimeter ammo as the M16, which the Army, when it adopted small-caliber rounds in the early 1960s, specified must be able to pierce a standard-issue helmet. The gun can spit out 800 rounds a minute.

M249 SQUAD AUTOMATIC WEAPON (SAW)

JOB: A portable machine gun issued to squad leaders, it can lay down high-volume support fire for both offensive and defensive purposes.
HISTORY: It weighs about twice as much as a standard-issue M16 or M4 but is two thirds the weight of the Rambo-era M60, which it began to replace in 1987.
FIREPOWER: Using light 5.56-millimeter ammo at a rate of 750 rounds a minute, the M249 can do the job of 10 to 20 infantrymen, pierce thinly clad vehicles and mow down groups of enemy soldiers.

M242 BUSHMASTER CANNON

JOB: The cannon, mounted on armored personnel carriers such as the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, is used to shoot at comparable enemy vehicles.
HISTORY: Instead of being powered by gas from its muzzle (as are the above guns), the M242 has an electric motor and a chain, a loop that drives the bolt back and forth. The cannon first appeared in 1983 and is employed by the Army, Navy and Marines.
FIREPOWER: Blasting 200 rounds of 25-millimeter ammo a minute, it can pierce armored vehicles—including tanks—from more than a mile away.

Richard figured, would be a haven from the perpetual crisis that marked his adolescence. Richard was not big, and he was picked on because of his Asian features. "I hate to say it, but we got a lot of backward people here in Missouri," says Lanny. "Richard took a lot of flak for the way he looked."

Richard was the kind of kid who'd draw ghouls and devils in his school notebooks, but there was a certain sensitivity to his line, an artistic touch. He was in "gifted" classes in grammar school, wrote poems both bawdy and sweet, and developed a passion for popular culture (a SpongeBob tattoo decorated his forearm; a naked female anime character wielding a tommy gun strutted across his shoulder), as well as for video games and fast imported cars.

The military bonded father and son. After boot camp Richard eschewed the duffel bag that the Army issued to new recruits and instead carried the tattered nylon one his father had taken to Vietnam, Korea and Germany. Even when Richard was stationed overseas, he called for advice about keeping warm during patrols in the frigid Eastern European winters. Lanny told him to wear panty hose—"the nylon kills the cold"—under everything he owned and then stand in the truck in a heavy sleeping bag up to his waist. "Gee, Dad, I don't know if the commander is gonna like that," Richard said. Lanny replied, "Just do as I tell you, son. I don't think he'll say a word." A few weeks later Richard called to say that the commander had the whole battalion following his improvised cold-weather dress code.

"You see, there's lots of things I tried to teach him," Lanny says now. "I sort of showed him how to be resourceful. I said, 'Son, wherever you go, if you need certain things, look around you. If it means cutting down a tree to make a hammock or something, that's what you have to do.'"

THE MIDTOWN MASSACRE

For two weeks the convoy drove north toward Baghdad, roadside corpses and mangled cars now part of the daily reality. Davis and Sapitan "realized we were stuck with each other," Sapitan recalls. He told Davis about his home in Florida. He recalls that Davis was "really funny" and "always making a smart-ass comment about something to keep your spirits up." Davis told Sapitan about his father. "He said he was looking forward to telling his war stories to his dad when he went home," Sapitan says.

Sapitan thought Davis was "an all-right guy," and even though it was Sapitan's Humvee, he let his passenger sleep in the cab at night while he stretched out on the roof. Sapitan would later label Davis "one of the most creative guys I ever met" after Richard tinkered with a Bradley headlamp he'd seen discarded in the desert and mounted it to the Humvee so they could read or write letters in the dark. Then Davis found a portable TV-VCR and videocassettes in an abandoned Army truck on the side of the road. He wired the unit to the Humvee's battery, and when the men camped they watched Bruce Willis blowing away bad guys in the *Die Hard* trilogy.

In early April 2003, after a two-week rumble of 250 miles over rough roads, the convoy circled the wagons. Then Davis received orders to return to his platoon. Overjoyed, he grabbed his pack and ran. "Hey, be careful," Sapitan shouted to his back. Davis spun around. "Yeah, you too...be careful," he said. Reunited with the members of B Company's third platoon, Davis would soon take part in the action he had always craved.

On April 11, three days after President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair met in Belfast, Northern Ireland to declare that the end of the

(continued on page 134)

THE BRUTAL ROAD TO BAGHDAD

The Third Infantry Division's armored task force moves past a burning Iraqi tanker in northern Baghdad (top). An Iraqi casualty of American firepower, viewed from the convoy.

DISHONOR (continued from page 112)

The street was shrouded in smoke, slick with blood. The Iraqis weren't so much shot as shredded.

Iraq war was near, B Company geared up, strapped on extra ammunition and headed to what the soldiers called "ambush alley," an eight-lane intersection on the east side of the Baghdad airport, where U.S. troops and convoys faced a near-constant barrage from rooftop snipers. "We heard there were 50 Syrian fighters up there, and we went to take the knuckleheads out," recalls Sergeant Frank Linda, a member of B Company's second platoon and a close friend of Davis's. "It seemed like it was always B Company cleaning up other people's messes. Other companies would just roll through these places, but if we were getting shot at we'd stop and level everything in a four-block radius—we didn't fuck around in B Company."

The firefight that followed lasted five hours and would turn out to be one of the most hellish and controversial engagements of the war. The fighting began as the formation of Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles swung into the street, where a tank gunner had spotted snipers on the roof of a tall office building at the northern end of the intersection. The gunner fired a 120-millimeter shell, and the wind force it generated as it hurtled through the air blew out all the windows along the street. The round struck the office building, pulverizing the middle stories. The enemy fighters on top of the building were blown into the air and then were sucked back down into the flaming rubble.

A second or two passed in silence. Then the entire street exploded with gunfire. Bullets and rocket-propelled grenades struck the convoy from every direction. Sitting in their Bradleys, the men watched the metal armor dent inward from direct hits by RPGs. "Holy fuck!" one of them cried out, his voice drowned by the deafening explosions. Trapped inside the hot metal interior, sandwiched together on narrow seats illuminated by the glow of LED lights, the men looked wide-eyed at one another and wondered if the armor would hold.

The American vehicles opened fire, pumping rounds into every building in the intersection. The Bradley gunners—one of whom was Private First Class Jacob Burgoyne, a 24-year-old from Middleburg, Florida—entered the street. With the 25-millimeter Bushmaster cannon clicked on autofire, Burgoyne and the others unloaded a barrage of 200 rounds a minute. Iraqis at close range hid behind cars and bunkers that offered no protection from these armor-piercing, depleted-uranium rounds, which were designed to penetrate tanks. The Iraqis weren't so much shot as shredded, sliced to pieces.

After several minutes of steady firing, the commanders ordered a "hold fire." The street was shrouded in smoke, slick with blood and body parts. "You saw legs, arms and just meat," one soldier says. "There was—I don't know what it was. It looked like a big steak stuck to the side of our Bradley, and later we had to peel it off.... We took a picture, though."

"Dismount left!" shouted the commander in Davis's Bradley. The six-man squad released the gangplank and sprinted to their left, into the rubble of the nearest house.

As they assessed what remained of the office building, a suicide attacker wearing an explosive vest ran toward a squad farther up the street; he detonated himself before reaching the squad, but shrapnel struck a captain in his arm and hand. "That's when the gloves came off," one soldier reportedly said afterward. All combatants taken prisoner were thenceforth treated as potential suicide bombers. According to an Army investigation, the battle's field colonel, after smoking two cigars during the fight, aimed his pistol at a combatant lying on the ground whom he suspected (falsely) of concealing a live grenade and shot him. (An investigation into the shooting was reopened in February.)

The Army has not released Iraqi casualty reports, but it's estimated as many as 100 enemy died during this exchange, and bodies were reported to be "piled in the streets." The hours following the initial gunfight saw such carnage that the men of B Company were calling ambush alley "the midtown massacre."

Late in the day Davis and his team buddy, Specialist Greg Pruitt, were paired on a house-to-house search. The two were momentarily separated as Davis climbed a wrecked staircase with two other men while Pruitt guarded the front door. A second team, made up of Woodcoff and another man, went down to a dark basement flooded knee-deep with water. From his position Pruitt could hear shots coming from above and below. Suddenly an Iraqi whom Woodcoff had injured crawled out from a basement window. Pruitt shot him twice with his SAW, a light machine gun capable of firing 750 rounds a minute. A few moments later Woodcoff returned from the basement, pushing two prisoners in front of him.

"I guess Woodcoff made them strip, because one of them had no pants, and the other guy was buck naked," says Pruitt. "The one with no pants, he'd had his arm blown off from a Bradley round. Richard came down and the sergeant told us to guard them, so we punched them to the ground." Then Davis did something strange, according to Pruitt. Whether the madness of the moment brought on a primal response in Davis or he was simply enjoying the prerogative of the conqueror, he "messed with the guy's shoulder and dug his hand inside the wound" as Pruitt watched.

"Fuck you, you Iraqi puke," Davis screamed, according to Pruitt, spitting on the wounded soldier. "I should kill you, you puke!"

Later, back at Fort Benning, attempting to put Davis's behavior in context, a soldier who spoke on the condition of anonymity said, "You know, it's not like what they tell you, the Geneva Convention and all that. When you're in a fight, you don't try to take prisoners or help the wounded. You finish people and keep moving. *Tap-tap,* two in the chest. At least that's how we did it." Still, of the four Iraqi POWs who survived the midtown massacre, two were under Davis's watch.

B Company's next mission was to guard more than 30 tractor trailers packed with rockets, ammunition and high explosives that the departing government had left parked in the middle of Baghdad. For the next several days Davis's platoon had orders to protect this cache from suicide attackers. The men cordoned off the area and took up positions on the roofs of the surrounding buildings. The job: Create a perimeter around the vehicles and disable any car that passes the safety zone.

"If a car had hit a truck, it would have blown up the entire area," says Specialist Donald Duncan, 27, who was stationed on a roof adjacent to Davis's. "We'd all be dead."

The days on the roof passed slowly. The soldiers watched the street below and waited. Then the first car approached. A blue sedan ignored their warning shots and sped straight toward the parked trucks, at which point Davis's and Duncan's squads opened fire. Their M16 rounds perforated the car's sheet metal roof, blew through the occupants and exited the other side. They would continue to shoot at a steady trickle of vehicles—sometimes

one, sometimes two a day—and remained edgy from hearing radio reports of more soldiers killed by suicide bombs.

"There were women and children in those cars sometimes, and you wondered if they didn't know what was going on when they heard the shots and just kept going or if they really were trying to get us," says Duncan. At that post for a week, he estimates that he went through eight magazines and that Davis, who had reason to fire more often, went through 11 or 12—more than 330 rounds.

When a car stopped moving "we just left them there," a soldier in Davis's squad recalls. "What was there to check? Everybody inside was dead. People would come and take out their relatives or whatever."

OCCUPATION

On May 1 President Bush declared victory from aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*. For the next two months the men of B Company remained in and around Baghdad. They constructed a temporary base in the rear buildings of a technical college. At the entrance was an Iraqi skull that Davis had stuck a knife into and mounted on a stick as a kind of mascot. "We saw it every day," recalls Pruitt, "but nobody wanted to take it down. The officers weren't going to take it down, man. They didn't even come back there. They were scared of us."

The Bradleys were "total wrecks," one soldier recalls. Nerves were fraying. Morale had slipped. The euphoria of conquest had given way to the dispiriting reality of occupation: having to carry 60 pounds of gear and protective armor for eight-hour patrols day after day. Rations were short, so two men had to share one ready-to-eat meal. They were fatigued, hungry, 15 or 20 pounds lighter than they were before the invasion and shrouded in dirt—their last hot shower was a lifetime ago, in Kuwait.

The men of Company B patrolled dusty streets lined with high cement walls behind which lurked both curious children and dangerous snipers. Davis took his usual place in their snaky single file, third of seven, as they looked for "suspicious shit," especially weapons and fedayeen, the elite Iraqi fighters. Nearly every day the platoon would find weapons caches—a crate of 20 rifles lying in an alleyway, a box of grenades under a tree. In a school gymnasium they found machine guns neatly stacked from floor to ceiling.

The Iraqi leadership "left hoping the people would take up arms," says a soldier who was there. "It's a damn good thing they didn't, or a lot more of us would be dead."

Going from house to house presented temptations for the Americans, especially when the homes belonged to Saddam's family or members of his regime. Some men took small weapons, knives, night-vision goggles, silver, gold, cash, jewels—whatever they could find and fit in their pockets.

One day at a crowded corner near a marketplace, Davis's squad approached a cluster of older Iraqis and asked, "Fedayeen? Fedayeen?" A frail white-haired man wearing a turban spoke English, and he began to reveal the location of a fedayeen group nearby. Before he could finish, a young man in Western clothes ran over and berated him in Arabic, struck the man as if to silence him, then took off running in the opposite direction. "We shot that idiot in the leg," Duncan recalls, "then dragged him back to the Bradley," where he was hog-tied and thrown in the hatch. "Can you imagine looking up in that dark, tight space and all you see are seven American soldiers staring down at you?" The entire squad "waled on him pretty good," kicking and smashing him on the floor of the Bradley. They dropped him, still hog-tied, at a meeting point for military intelligence to pick up. As the prisoner lay there Davis poked him, pretending to be a medic. "Does this hurt here?" Davis asked. "Yes, yes, it hurts," said the Iraqi. "What about here? Does this hurt? How about here? Here? Here?" One soldier recalls, "He kept poking that guy." He laughs at the recollection. "Yeah, Richard was an idiot."

As conditions worsened, Davis "started isolating himself from the platoon," says one soldier who knew him, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "It wasn't like we hated him or anything—he just became a loner." He was always running off somewhere. Recalls Pruitt, "You could never find him when you needed to, because he never hung around. He always went out looking for stuff."

Davis's solo raids were annoying, but ever the resourceful soldier, he always returned with useful items—hoses and clamps to improvise a shower system, Iraqi flags, swords, AK-47s. One day, searching an underground palace, Davis found a bathroom richly appointed with pink-marble sinks, a solid-gold toilet and a silver tissue box encrusted with jewels. "He said he wanted to try to take the toilet," recalls his friend Sergeant Linda, "but the captain came along and said no." Davis took the jeweled tissue box instead. Duncan recalls his reaction: "Whoa! That's nice. Where'd you get it?" Davis squirreled his souvenir away; it was the last time anyone reported seeing it.

"She's the new antidepressant his doctor prescribed."

On May 5 Richard Davis called home and spoke to his father for half an hour. He was in a good mood, Lanny recalls, because he believed he'd be coming home soon. "He was looking forward to working on his car."

Fifteen days later something had clearly gone wrong. Davis borrowed a cell phone from a reservist. The excitement that had characterized his early calls home was now gone, replaced by terror and anguish. "Dad, you gotta get me out of here," Richard said. He was crying. Lanny said he couldn't do that. "If I had, Richard would never have forgiven me. I figured he was going to have to work it through." But the call haunts Lanny; he would hear it in his head over and over and try to discern in his son's jumbled plea the exact nature of his distress. "He said he was afraid of everybody, that he couldn't trust nobody. I don't know if he was talking about the Iraqis or his own people, but he was scared."

Six weeks passed, and finally, during the first week of July 2003, the men of B Company were sent back to Kuwait to be decommissioned en route to the States. They weren't treated to a welcoming reception. "When we got back to Kuwait," says Duncan, "we all walked into the chow hall together, with our dirty uniforms, looking all banged up. It was like a movie. Everybody stopped eating and stared. Nobody would talk to us. They were told to stay away from us. They said we were crazy murderers and rapists." Duncan pauses and looks at his hands. "Well, I can see the murder part, seeing as how we did kill a lot of people."

The men were supposed to relax in the relative safety of the rear camp in Kuwait and "get out of God mode, where we could kill anyone," one soldier recalls. But the hot tents and close quarters, combined with the sudden absence of an enemy toward which they could channel their aggression, had the opposite effect, and the men took to fighting among themselves. "*Everyone* fought in the desert," says one soldier. "People were getting into it all the time. It was a pretty bad scene."

According to Lanny, Richard confided in a friend in Kuwait, a medic named Edward Wolf. "Don't mention this to anyone," Davis pleaded before showing Wolf his hand. It had been deeply punctured by a knife, the wound still open. Wolf applied a bandage. Richard told Wolf—according to Lanny, who had spoken with Army investigators—that the stabbing had been "a gang-related ritual" he'd suffered at the hands of two fellow soldiers in his platoon: Alberto Martinez, 23, a father of two from Oceanside, California, and Mario Navarrete, 24, of San Juan, Puerto Rico—buddies who were always seen together. The two were thought of as reliable and levelheaded soldiers, but Martinez had a reputation as a gangbanger. "He bragged about having greased people before joining the military," says a B Company soldier. Greg Pruitt recalls an incident in Iraq that took place when he and Martinez returned to the makeshift base after guarding a shopping mall. Martinez was lewdly rocking his hips, Pruitt says, and holding his hands as if he were grabbing a woman's waist.

"I know you did something, or you wouldn't be smiling," Pruitt said. Martinez hesitated, then responded that he and Navarrete had just "fucked two Iraqi girls" in the shopping center. "I bet you didn't use a condom," Pruitt said. Martinez said he had, but Pruitt didn't believe him. He did not think much about this conversation until many months later.

FORT BENNING

B Company reassembled at Fort Benning, its home post, bound on one side by Victory Drive, a six-lane wasteland of used-car lots, tattoo parlors and strip clubs near the small town of Columbus. Later, those who knew Richard Davis and Jacob Burgoyne would remark that it was strange these men didn't head their separate ways once they returned, for they disliked each other from the instant they met. They had a lot in common—both were raised by idealized soldier fathers and had grown up in the shadows of their fathers' exploits—but perhaps they were too similar to be friends. When they met at Fort Benning in early January 2002, each was busy proving to his drinking buddies that he was capable of screwing around with the military's restrictions. Davis climbed a balcony railing, leaped to a narrow ledge and playacted a suicide. "I can't take it anymore," he shouted, laughing. "I'm going to end it."

Burgoyne, who had struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts, was not amused. He told Davis to get the hell down or he'd "smoke his ass." Davis laughed, jumped down from the railing, got right in Burgoyne's face and laughed again, and he continued to laugh as Burgoyne grew livid and then sucker punched him.

Burgoyne is over six feet tall, thick in the chest and back with a boxer's rounded shoulders. In fact, brawling was his specialty: He fought at every opportunity, never lost and once punched a fellow soldier so hard the man fell into a coma. "Burgoyne was a friend of mine," one soldier says, "but he was pretty erratic. He could flip on you quick, so you tried to stay on his good side."

"Everyone was afraid of Burgoyne," Linda says. "But Richard wasn't."

Davis and Burgoyne were assigned to live across from each other and share a bathroom in Fort Benning's dormitory-style living quarters. Burgoyne had flown back from Kuwait two days before Davis. He'd come home a deeply troubled man, having attempted suicide on July 5 while in Kuwait. Army medical records uncovered by United Press International show that Burgoyne had expressed "homicidal and suicidal" thinking and been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Patient views his role in killing enemy

GOING DOWN WITH THE SHIP?
STEWARD! I HAVE A COMPLAINT! LAST NIGHT A DRUNKEN SEAMAN TRIED TO GET INTO MY CABIN!
WHAT DO YOU EXPECT ON A DISCOUNT CRUISE? THE CAPTAIN?
CABIN 12
CABIN 12
sexy myths

soldiers in a poor light, inquiring if he should feel like a murderer," according to a hospital note written in Kuwait on July 7. Army counselors ordered that Burgoyne be kept under watch at all times and not be allowed near a weapon. Back at Fort Benning, though, a different conclusion was reached. After a 40-minute interview in which Burgoyne said he was feeling better, he was released to do as he pleased, which included going out drinking at a strip club with Davis, Navarrete, Woodcoff and Martinez.

PART II: FOUND

By mid-August, back in St. Charles, Missouri, Lanny and Remy were growing frantic; an entire month had passed without any word from their son. Lanny abandoned his gravel-hauling business to devote himself to the search. The first step, he knew, was critical: convincing the military to list his son as a missing person rather than AWOL. The distinction is an important one. Missing-persons cases are investigated—they are entered into a national database that distributes information to police departments across the country—whereas AWOL cases are not. The Army doesn't chase AWOL soldiers. After dozens of phone calls, Lanny, exasperated, told his wife, "I think I better go down there, because they're not giving me any information whatsoever on the phone."

If I surprise them, maybe they won't give me a line of crap, Lanny thought to himself on the afternoon of August 19, 2003 as he got into his truck and headed east. All he wanted, he kept telling himself, was a level playing field. "Fair is fair," he likes to say. "I'm not looking for special treatment because I'm a veteran, but I don't like it when people treat me like they don't have to bother. Hell, I'm educated. I'm not dumb. Some people act like because you were in the military you're stupid."

Lanny had grown up dirt poor, the son of a sharecropper, living in a rickety shack on the Arkansas plains, eating peanuts out of the ground, hunting and fishing for food. He was one of 10 kids, four of whom joined the military. The Army helped him climb into the middle class, but the journey left him sensitive to inequality. He spoke out often, his demands for fairness articulated in a hoarse and scratchy voice, a condition resulting from an encounter with a Viet Cong soldier who jammed a rifle butt into Lanny's trachea, crushing his vocal cords. Lanny shot the man at close range, killing him.

At the Fort Benning checkpoint Lanny flashed his retired-military ID and was waved through. He tracked down First Sergeant Sabala, his son's superior officer, but got nowhere. He asked Sabala for someone who might have been "close with his son," but the sergeant told him, "Richard was a loner. No one really knew him. He kept to himself, so I don't think there's anyone here who could tell you much. I myself hardly knew him. I was pretty new to this platoon. We're doing all we can to find him, though."

At these words, Lanny boiled over. "I don't know what you're trying to pull, First Sergeant, but I'm retired military police—I know the situations. If my son was the worst guy in the battalion, he would be known as the worst guy in the battalion, *but he would be known.*"

Lanny stayed in a hotel room near Fort Benning and spent the next three days canvassing every authority and every department at the post. He slammed into one bureaucratic brick wall after another. He asked to see if his son's bank account had been tapped, and no one called him back. He went to the personnel office to see his son's effects, looking "for simple things...maybe evidence of what happened to him or where he might have went." The presiding officer told him it would be an invasion of privacy. "Well, *I am* his father," Lanny replied. "I'm not going to take anything." Increasingly frustrated, Lanny went "off-post" to the Columbus police station, where he tried to file a missing-persons report. The desk officer was sympathetic but told him that only the military handles military-related issues.

Lanny drove home in a state of deep despair. Groping for a plausible explanation, he surmised that Richard might have developed post-traumatic stress disorder, from which Lanny himself has suffered since Vietnam. "Maybe he had a touch of amnesia or a blackout or something and just kind of wandered away," he told his wife. This was a thin theory, Lanny knew, but at least it was somewhat optimistic and comforting. In his gut, however, he felt that the truth was far worse. As he steered his pickup onto the highway, back toward Missouri, one conclusion kept pushing the others aside: Richard is probably dead.

On September 8 Lanny called his congressman, Kenny Hulshof, and got results. The congressman contacted the office of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, demanding that the Department of Defense investigate the disappearance of Richard Davis. By September 16 an inquiry had been launched. Army detectives began interviewing the men in Davis's platoon.

The men of B Company stonewalled. Nobody knew where Davis was. But when detectives began to cross-examine them more seriously, threatening jail time if the men withheld information, there was a break in the case. A single soldier came forward and repeated the rumor he had been hearing for weeks: Four men—Burgoyne, Martinez, Navarrete and Woodcoff—had left Davis lying in the woods near the 4400 block of Milgen Road.

"I changed my mind. Keep the brain. I want a really huge penis!"

MILGEN ROAD

During working hours there are only two reasons to drive to the 4400 block of Milgen Road, a two-lane street intersecting Manchester Expressway, one of Columbus's busiest strips: to look for a bed or a weapon. The mattress store (DOUBLES ARE ONLY $99) is next to a gun store and range called Shooters. Both businesses have small parking lots in front, but when these are filled customers park across the street on a gravel shoulder about as wide as three vehicles and twice as long. At night this part of Milgen Road is dark and quiet, and the wooded area behind the gravel shoulder, though only 100 yards deep, can seem like the most secluded place on earth.

"We came up here, and the funny thing is, we started seeing bones, little bones along the pathway as we were walking up—even before we got to the corpse," says Detective Bernard Spicer of the Columbus Police Department. "There was a piece of a leg, a thigh bone here, a bone there. The torso and head were lying there, next to that log, and you can see the burn marks on the log from where they burned the body. That was all that was left of him—the head and the torso. The ribs and such, everything else, the animals got to and was scattered all around."

It's a month and a half later, and as Spicer walks the crime scene, the trees are bare and the ground strewn with garbage: a Budweiser can, a refrigerator, pieces of furniture. Peeking through the other side of the woods is the mowed lawn of a public park, a walking trail and a lake where a brood of ducks waddles and swims. "We found a knife at the scene and a set of keys, too," Spicer continues. "And there was some kind of cap—like a skullcap—on his head. I don't know why he would have been wearing that in the Georgia summer, so all I can assume is that they put it on him."

Spicer, who has spent 14 years with the Columbus Police Department, adds, "Sometimes you see that in a homicide, where the victim's face or head is covered. It's a sign that they cared for the victim, an expression of love or something like that. It's when they hate the victim that you find the face battered in or desecrated."

The same day the skeleton was discovered, military police arrested the four men of B Company while they were training at Fort Benning. They were delivered to the Columbus police for interrogation. Detective Drew Tyner, a 17-year veteran of the Columbus Police Department, took control of the case. A large man with a basketball player's build, Tyner speaks slowly and deliberately, as if inspecting every shade of meaning before allowing a word to leave his mouth. Tyner had already interviewed members of Davis's platoon and had heard stories about the fearsome Burgoyne, but he was disappointed to find instead "your typical bully," puffed up with false bravado. Three days later, after questioning Burgoyne and Navarrete, Tyner appeared at the November 10 Recorders Court hearing to testify about how the men of B Company described what they had done to Specialist Richard Davis.

"Once they got outside into the parking lot, the guys were upset with Mr. Davis for getting them thrown out of the club," Tyner began his testimony, choosing his words carefully. "Mr. Burgoyne and Mr. Davis started striking one another and got into an argument in the parking lot. They got into the car that they had come in. They drove around for a bit. At that time they were all still arguing with Mr. Davis. They came to a location where he didn't know exactly where they were. The driver stopped the car, and they all got out."

The fighting continued. Burgoyne and Davis were duking it out; Navarrete joined in. All of a sudden, and with no apparent motive, Martinez pulled a knife with a three-inch blade, rushed Davis and stabbed him, at which point there was an emission of "frothy blood" from his side, Navarrete told police. Davis fell to the ground. According to Burgoyne's statement, he began to talk to Martinez, trying to get him to stop. Martinez refused. According to a lawyer close to the case, Burgoyne told Martinez it wasn't too late, that they could still take Davis to the hospital. He told Martinez to think of his family, his son. But Martinez continued to stab Davis. At this point, according to his statement, Burgoyne turned his back on Martinez and walked away as Martinez stabbed Davis over and over.

Navarrete's statement mirrors Burgoyne's up to this point but then differs. He said he tried to stop Martinez but that Burgoyne stepped between them, blocking his way. "'He's got to do what he's got to do,'" Navarrete recalled Burgoyne saying. Then both Navarrete and Burgoyne turned away, allowing Martinez to continue the killing. (Woodcoff refused to make a statement, but Burgoyne and Navarrete agreed that Woodcoff had not taken part in the assault.)

According to police, Burgoyne and Navarrete said they, along with Martinez, then dragged Davis's body into the woods, near a fallen tree about 50 yards from the road. The four then drove to a nearby convenience store and gas station and purchased a container of lighter fluid. They returned to Davis's body. At this point lighter fluid was poured on Davis. Burgoyne struck a match and threw it down. Davis's body was engulfed in flames.

Burgoyne, according to his own admission, suggested to Martinez that he change the tires on his car and wash the interior. Three or four days later,

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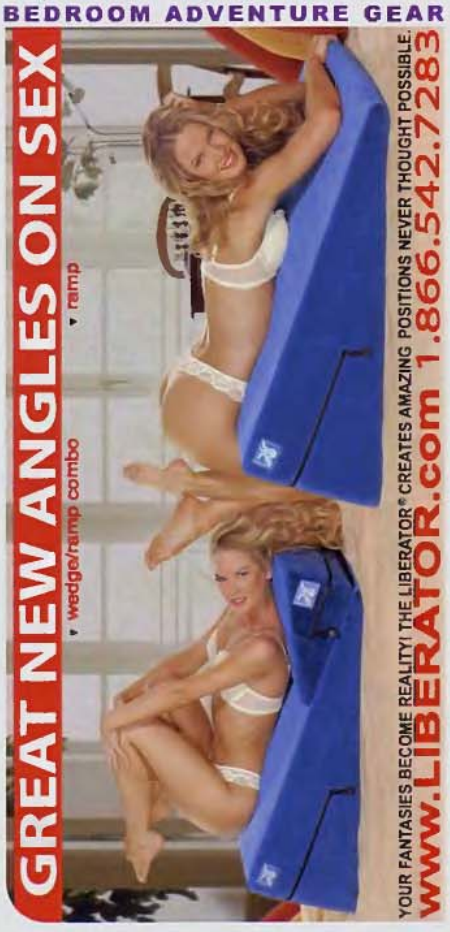
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planning to bury Davis, they returned to the scene minus Woodcoff, who couldn't be found. The ground was too hard for their shovels, they said, so they left the body lying in the weeds and returned to their post.

Davis's remains puzzled the coroner. "He'd been stabbed at least 32 or 33 times. That's what we counted on the bones," the coroner says. "But we didn't really count the legs—we concentrated on the torso and the head. He might have been stabbed a lot more than that, because we'd have no way of knowing about the fleshy parts of the body." But the coroner is sure of one thing: The coup de grâce had been a stab to the head that pierced Davis's skull. "It was over then for sure," he says. "I just can't see why anybody would do that to a fellow soldier."

THEORIES

Four against one. A bloodstained car. The more Lanny turned the story over in his mind, the more he became convinced that Burgoyne and Navarrete were lying. There was only one version that made sense to Lanny: His son was jumped, ganged up on in the strip club parking lot by all four men and shoved, bleeding, into the car. "It doesn't make any sense otherwise. You're going to tell me that my son would willingly get into the car of someone he just fought?"

The way Lanny sees it, when the five soldiers pulled to the side of the road, four of them had already conspired to murder Davis. And Davis did not lie on the ground, quietly bleeding for 15 minutes while Burgoyne tried to persuade Martinez not to take Davis's life. Davis was restrained while Martinez repeatedly stabbed him. One law enforcement officer believes this version as well, especially considering Davis's physical condition. "I don't find it credible that the first stab wound would have put him down," he says. "Davis would still have been able to flee after one cut. Unless he was held down.

"He was fighting for his life," says Lanny, "and he was scared for his life. And these other three that were with Martinez said they tried to stop Martinez several times by telling him not to do it. Well, I'm here to tell you straight up, that's not how you stop someone from either beating someone to death or stabbing them to death. You don't just stand there and say, 'Oh, I better stop it.' My *god*, there's a murder being committed."

On the last day of November an e-mail was posted on a conservative open-forum Internet site. It was addressed to Davis's cousin Jennifer Lapuz, who had built a website commemorating his life. The writer said he had heard at Fort Benning a "soldier stating that the reason your cousin was murdered was because he had some information on the suspected individuals who were involved in raping a young girl in Iraq and that your cousin was going to report them." The author of the e-mail, who remains anonymous, went on: "It sounded sensible to me, because I doubt that your cousin was killed over something as stupid as insulting a stripper in a nightclub."

A Columbus law enforcement official with knowledge of the case, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said he considered Burgoyne's and Navarrete's testimony "the biggest load of bull I've ever heard. But if that's the lie they want to tell, and it's still going to get them convicted, and we don't have nothing better, then that's what we go with." The official doesn't put much stock in Lanny's theories, however, dismissing them as Internet chatter. "It was probably over something stupid. They didn't like Davis to begin with—and to tell you the truth, it was easy for those guys to kill. They probably did it for the pleasure of it."

Still, the rape theory had been circulating in the platoon for some time, long before Lanny heard about the anonymous e-mail. One soldier says, "Even before we heard Richard's dad talk about that, me and some of my friends were saying that it might have been over an Iraqi girl."

But when Pruitt, Davis's team buddy, is asked about the theory that Davis had witnessed a rape involving Martinez and Navarrete and was killed because he planned to report it, his answer leaves no ambiguities. Sitting on his bunk at Fort Benning, disassembling his SAW, Pruitt says, "Even if he did see something extravagant like that, I don't think he would've cared too much about it. Not Richard."

•

Three of the men who on that warm July evening left the strip club with Richard Davis were charged with his murder. Martinez, Burgoyne and Navarrete were also accused of assault and armed robbery. Now, as the case winds its way through the courts, Lanny Davis feels he is close to cracking up. Conspiracies and hidden agendas pull

"How would you like to appear on a new reality show I'm developing? How it works is you and several other women will have sex with me. I won't bother you with the rest of the details."

on his mind. Why, he wonders, did First Sergeant Sabala lie to him, tell him that Davis was a loner, if he wasn't covering something up? Why did the Army send a lieutenant colonel to deliver the news of Davis's death when that job is normally reserved for a captain or a high lieutenant? When an old Army buddy recently called, a man Lanny had not heard from in 30 years, he felt "strange about that, too" and couldn't help but wonder "if he'd been asked to call me, you know, to keep an eye on me."

Troubling financial questions have yet to be answered. Davis's room was broken into after he was listed as AWOL (military police suspect one of the four defendants), and when Lanny received his son's effects nothing among them was of value—no jeweled tissue box, just a marble bathroom tile. According to Davis's bank statements, during his last afternoon alive he withdrew $1,000 in two separate transactions from ATMs in Columbus—yet the receipts found in his room suggest he purchased only a pack of tube socks and a pair of shorts.

SQUARED AWAY

Richard Davis was laid to rest on December 13, the day before Saddam Hussein was discovered hiding in a hole. He was buried in a civilian cemetery in Sunset Hills Memorial Park in California—Lanny's decision—but the Army conducted the ceremony, with a 21-gun salute and all the pomp and ritual befitting the passing of a warrior.

Lanny refused to wear his uniform. "I should take it out and burn it," he says. He paid close attention to the proceedings. Several soldiers said kind things about Richard during the service. "He was resourceful" and "gave his last cigarette and meal away." He was "creative" and "reliable," and they told stories about how Richard jury-rigged a stove so the men could eat hot food. They said Richard always talked about going home and sharing his war stories with his father. Lanny felt these feel-good tales were patronizing, again believing he was being treated as a grieving father and not as a fellow soldier who knew something was amiss. He wanted to know what his son was really like in the field.

Lanny was even more bothered when Richard's captain called him a "brave and valiant soldier," because he knew the captain had never even met his boy.

At the conclusion of a military funeral, the bereaved are given a velvet-lined oak box containing a folded American flag. Tucked inside the folds are three live M16 cartridges: two for defending the flag against the enemy, one for yourself if you are about to be captured. Lanny was grateful for the flag, and he noticed it had been folded perfectly, every line taut and symmetrical, squared away. "It's got to be just right," he says, "and those boys did a terrific job."

At the airport a security guard became alarmed by the bullets and reached for them before Lanny warned in his menacing croak, "Don't mess with that flag."

"I have to have those bullets, sir."

"No you don't, son."

Lanny's voice turned cold and threatening: "Keep your hands off that flag." The security guard stared at Lanny, who refused to concede. Lanny edged forward, putting himself within striking distance of the guard, and spoke. "That's all I've got left of my son," he said. "And right now you are desecrating his remains."

•

On a mild January day in St. Charles, Lanny unfurls the canvas dust shield covering his son's souped-up Honda. "She sure can scat," he says. He gestures to a few slight dents on the body panel of the car. Kneeling, he traces the contours of the metal. "You can see he got a couple of ouches here," Lanny says. "I was going to take them out, but now I think I might just leave them be. Because he did it.... Oh, I don't know."

In the basement of the Davis home, his son left behind five storage boxes of belongings. As Lanny opens one of the boxes, he takes a breath and says, "Boy, if he knew we were doing this, he'd say it was an invasion of his privacy. I never seen half this stuff."

He flips past piles of LPs, posters, Army recruiting magazines and military comic books, pausing when he comes across an orange fright wig. "Rich, what the hell you doing with this?" he says, full of mirth.

He lifts up a pair of black paratrooper boots and gives them a thorough examination. He inspects the density of the rubber sole, pushing his fingers into the leather and feeling its suppleness, then tugs on the laces. "Yeah, they got them speed laces on boots now.... Richard had wide feet, size 9EE. Had to have his boots special ordered."

At the bottom of the box is a framed three-by-five of Richard in what can be described only as a state of pure bliss. He's wearing a T-shirt and jeans and is sprawled on a couch, grinning widely. His eyes are half closed, and whipped cream is smeared across his lips, presumably applied by the busty naked woman who is leaning suggestively over him. "Pretty good-looking girl, Rich," Lanny says in his gravely drawl. "Yeah, he's probably inebriated here. I remember after Bosnia they went over to Turkey for like two weeks. And he told me, 'Dad, the girls here let you do whatever you want.'"

Lanny pauses and smiles. "I told him, 'Yeah, son, I been in some countries like that too.'"

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